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ABSTRACT

The role that institutional research can play in providing strategic information for evaluating the feasibility of establishing satellite campuses is outlined. Satellite campuses are intended to serve new student markets as well as provide better access for existing students via off-campus sites. Both internal and external factors affecting satellite campus facilities development are examined in this report. The investigation of internal factors include: reviewing institutional surveys as a source of attitudinal information concerning student, faculty, and alumni interests in satellite course offerings; and examining the geographic distribution of students, alumni and public service participants in order to delineate highly accessible sites for new campuses. External factors for possible research include: (1) an analysis of the various market segments in the region that could potentially respond to new educational services in outlying areas; (2) an examination of potentially high accessible sites within the region based on population concentrations and transportation corridors; (3) an assessment of the economic feasibility of satellite campus development; and (4) a review of the general administrative and/or procedural problems associated with the creation of satellite sites. (Author/LBH)

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Abstract

IS THERE A ROLE FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH IN INNOVATIVE PLANNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

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Offices of institutional research can play a significant role in bringing about innovative approaches to planning in higher education. The research function is a predominantly fact-finding activity; however, the input provided to academic planners can help decision making become more responsive and relevant. This paper outlines the role which institutional research can play in providing decision makers with strategic information with which to evaluate the feasibility of establishing satellite campuses. (Satellite campuses are intended to serve new student markets as well as provide better access for existing students via off-campus sites.) Basic information useful to decision makers which can be provided by institutional research involves a detailed analysis of the service area surrounding the institution.

The research is multifaceted in that both internal and external factors affecting satellite campus facilities development are examined. The investigation of internal factors include (1) reviewing institutional surveys as a source of attitudinal information concerning student, faculty, and alumni interests in satellite course offerings, and (2) examining the geographic distribution of students, alumni and public service participants in order to delineate highly accessible sites for new campuses. External factors for possible research include (1) an analysis of the various market segments in the region that could potentially respond to new educational services in outlying areas, (2) an examination of potentially high accessible sites within the region based on population concentrations and transportation corridors, (3) an assessment of the economic feasibility of satellite campus development, and (4) a review of the general administrative and/or procedural problems associated with the creation of satellite sites.

IS THERE A ROLE FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH IN INNOVATIVE PLANNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

The institutional research function in most colleges and universities is multifaceted. Typically, the researcher must act in various roles in conducting research projects, such as financial analyst for budget studies, or a sociologist in conducting demographic studies. The traditional (and basic) role played by the researcher is that of data analyst or fact finder. Essentially, this role arises from the need for concise and accurate information to be used in the decision-making process at the institution.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest yet another role for the researcher as a facilitator for innovative planning in higher education. In this role the researcher links the community and the institution by gathering data on the environment of both the institution and the local community and then presenting the results as usable information for the decision-making process. This paper will suggest how a researcher can assist in innovative planning, concluding with an example of a specific role in the development of satellite campuses.

The Researcher as the Knowledge Link Between the Institution and the Community

Institutions of higher education in this country have traditionally been isolated entities apart from the local community. The term "ivory tower" as it is used by the general citizenry is just one example of this separation. It is the contention of this author that there exists a substantial knowledge gap between those who inhabit the halls of academe and the public who support the

institutions. The institution professes the need for its students to be well-rounded and well-trained so that upon graduation they will be productive members of our society. For the past few decades, the general public has perceived universities and colleges as sites where people learn a skill or a trade which will ensure jobs for graduates after completion of formal training. This dichotomy of attitudes on the purpose of formal education has given rise to a lack of mutual understanding and thereby an information gap.

The institutional researcher can aid in closing this gap from the perspective of the institution by supplying local community information to decision makers. This role demands that the researcher be familiar with the internal environment of the institution as well as the external characteristics of the surrounding community. In order to adequately fill this role, the researcher must have access to both internal and external sources of data. Readily accessible data bases on students, faculty and staff are usually maintained by most colleges and universities. Data on the local community are generally available from various city/county planning agencies, the Chamber of Commerce, the Department of Education, and various state and national governmental agencies. In accumulating and organizing data from the total environment, the researcher can provide institutional leadership with meaningful and useful information.

The accessibility to, or lack of data sources places constraints upon the researcher. Though there may be substantial institutional data systems, they may be maintained in such a way that extraction or analysis of data is restricted. This is of particular concern in institutions where data must be retrieved manually. In using external sources of data, problems may

arise concerning its accuracy, consistency, and timeliness (e.g., U. S. Census data becomes outdated rather quickly). A researcher must become familiar with the types of data available in the community.

An understanding of how decisions are made at the institutions and who the major participants are in the decision-making process is essential if researchers are to fill the knowledge gap between institutions and their communities. An effective synthesis of institutional and community information comes about by pinpointing strategic individuals who can utilize information in a responsive and relevant manner. Information must not only be channeled to key people; these individuals must recognize its usefulness. Only then does it become relevant.

Planning for Satellite Campuses

The concept of satellite campus development is used as an example of innovative planning. This type of development exemplifies the need for understanding both internal and external factors affecting the university. Development of a satellite campus demands that an institution understand the social, economic, and political structure of the surrounding community. The institutional researcher can aid in providing the necessary information from which decision makers can gauge the acceptability of satellite campuses among the general population. Planners need to pinpoint the off-campus sites which will generate maximum use of the institution's educational services.

Internal Factors

Internal factors which should be explored and developed by the researcher include attitudes of students, faculty and alumni toward satellite course offerings; the demographic structure of the student body, and the

geographic distribution of students, alumni and public service participants as potential users of satellite sites.

Institutional surveys can elicit attitudinal data. They may be conducted during a self-study program at an institution, or developed for purposes of research in the admissions and registration processes. The surveys furnish needed information concerning the interest levels for individuals who are or have been affiliated with the institution, and who therefore can present assertions for the desirability of satellite classes.

The demographic structure of the student body provides the composition of the students who currently attend the institution which may be useful for determining a profile of the "typical" student in the local community. By profiling the demographic structure of the typical student, the researcher can review both student characteristics and popularity of programs, thus pinpointing academic areas of major interest.

In order to properly assess potential satellite sites, it is suggested that an examination of the geographic distribution of students be conducted. Geographic locations can be identified easily through the admissions' or registrar's student data file. These files generally contain information on place of residence by zip code. Once zip codes are determined, these data can be mapped using computer mapping programs, such as Synagraphic Computer Mapping (SYMAP), or they can be mapped manually. When the data are mapped the researcher has a visual statement as to the residential location of students living off campus, providing some idea as to where potential satellite sites may be placed.

The basic concept behind reviewing the internal structure of students (both geographic location and demography) is to help the researcher become

more knowledgeable about the current student population. This provides a basic framework from which to begin studying the needs and interests of the local population. Although the current student body will not represent "new" markets for educational services, it is important for the researcher to understand the basic student structure of the institution.

External Factors

The external factors which should be considered are market segments within the region which could potentially respond to new educational services in outlying areas; location of highly accessible sites within the region; the economic feasibility of satellite campus development; and consideration of the general administrative and/or procedural problems associated with establishing such sites. These factors compose the critical elements both for study by the institutional researcher and for evaluation by academic planners.

At the outset, it is imperative that the academic planners accurately perceive those markets to be served at satellite sites. Without knowledge of potential markets it would be difficult to investigate possible sites or the types of programs to be offered. Market segments may be widely diverse, and delineating those markets requires thoughtful consideration on both the part of the researcher and academic planner. Some market segments may be identified initially when conducting internal research on the current or past users of educational services at the institution (e.g., alumni and public service participants). The researcher should study all possible markets, outlining them in a detailed form. For example, some of the more obvious markets might be high school graduates not enrolled in an institution of

higher education, and junior college students. Less obvious but just as important are those market segments consisting of female heads of households who are entering the job market and are in need of college training, or the senior citizens who may not have had the financial resources, the time or access to a college or university.

Market segments may be identified in various ways. Reviewing demographic studies published by local planning agencies can provide the researcher with some idea as to potential markets and the number of people within each segment. The market segments delineated by the researcher ultimately should be surveyed in order to discover those educational needs desired by each segment. At that time, academic program planning can be initiated.

Once the potential market populations are specified, the geographic locations of particular markets should be studied. This distribution can be found by examining government publications such as Bureau of the Census data, or by consulting local public agencies who collect demographic data by census tract. The researcher thus can map general residential locations of various market groups, which is essential in determining locations for satellite campuses. The campus, or campuses, should be accessible to as many market segments as is feasible. Optimal sites are located near major highways, thoroughfares, or rapid transit stations. The researcher should be familiar with all major transportation routes in order to correlate the market population with highly accessible sites.

One factor which is of extreme importance to the development process for satellite campuses is the cost of the acquisition of property and the cost of facilities operation. The economic question is critical in this period of fluctuating enrollments and funding cutbacks. Academic planners

require detailed cost estimates before any move is made to seriously consider one possible site over another.

Cost estimates must include cost of construction (or rental and remodeling cost if the site is to be leased), cost of furnishings, personnel costs, and general maintenance costs. The institutional researcher should become familiar with property costs in the general location of proposed satellite sites. It is important to be aware of the possibility of fluctuating land cost (or rental price) during the period of research on satellite development. These costs can be monitored by following various real estate trade magazines for the region or by contacting local real estate agents. Other cost estimates can be obtained from the purchasing and plant departments within the institution. Costs breakdowns should be presented for alternative sites and any possible future change in cost should also be indicated.

While evaluating economic feasibility, the researcher should try to be cognizant of both short-term and long-term economic constraints. Short-term economic gains for the institution must be examined in light of long-term economic losses and vice versa. Institutional leadership must be presented with an objective forecast of the economic advantages and disadvantages as perceived by the researcher.

The last external factor to be considered involves the possible administrative and procedural problems which may accompany satellite development. These include the negative reactions of public and private institutions competing for students; the response that satellite development might engender from the controlling board of the institution; potential adverse reactions from local politicians; and negative reactions to the proposed project from within the institution. These particular problems should be addressed in

the research report to make the institutional leadership aware of potential hurdles to be encountered in the process.

Summary

Institutional researchers assume numerous roles while conducting their research activities. At any point in time they may be asked to wear the hat of a sociologist, a financial analyst, an economist, or a marketing specialist. Their flexibility in responding to myriad situations makes them invaluable assets in innovative planning at institutions of higher education.

This paper presented an example of the role played by the institutional researcher in the planning process for a satellite campus. The researcher, armed with a detailed knowledge of the institution, attempts to link internal with external factors which affect satellite development in order to increase the relevance, responsiveness and accuracy of the planning process. The researcher enables the academic planner to evaluate such sites more objectively as a result of the knowledge gained about the relationship between the institution and the local community.